

From The Unification Church to the Unification Movement And Back

David G. Bromley and Alexa Blonner
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Two widely observed patterns in the development of new religious movements are a gradual settling of the movement and a transition in leadership from the movement founder/leader(s) to their successors. We report here on the confluence of these two developments in Unificationism over the last several years. This report is based on personal interviews with Unificationists involved in managing the changes that are occurring, participant observation at local centers, and both public and members only websites where internal conversations and new policies are available.

Two principal changes in Unificationist organization have occurred. First, the longstanding tensions between established church and social movement forms of organization are being resolved in favor of the former. Second, Rev. Moon has begun passing organizational leadership to several of his children. Both of these processes have involved considerable turmoil, and the two developments have overlapped and interacted with one another. These two major developments offer a unique opportunity to observe and record the process of simultaneous organizational and leadership transformation.

Movement-Church Tensions

Throughout its history Unificationism has incorporated both church and social movement characteristics. In Korea, Unificationism has more consistently exhibited a more traditional church profile; in the United States early Unificationism was formally organized as the Unification Church but operated primarily as a social movement.^[i] Focal activities for the decade following Rev. Moon's arrival in the United States in 1972 were missionizing, fundraising, and support for Moon's messianic agenda. Virtually all of this activity took the form of limited-lifespan projects. Indeed, Moon periodically rotated the small number of members occupying bureaucratic positions in order to head off institutionalization and consistently asserted that it was never his intention to establish yet another church. The movement did establish the Unification Theological Seminary, which potentially provided Unificationism with ministerial leadership, but made no attempt to construct churches or create corresponding organizational apparatus. Most members were uninvolved in the more formally organized corporate network that gradually developed.^[ii]

Several changes that began a decade after Moon's arrival in the United States suggested at least a partial settling of the movement. Early in the 1980s most of the Western membership was "blessed" (married) and began to assume more conventional family lifestyles. Moon initiated the Home Church Project that encouraged members to establish families in local communities and reach out to their neighbors.^[iii] After that point Moon was much less successful in mobilizing members for work on his many messianic projects. Nonetheless, as late as 1991 Moon announced that church members should return to their hometowns in order to undertake apostolic work there. The following year at the World Cultural and Sports Festival in Seoul, Korea Moon publicly announced that he and his wife together had completed their godly-ordained mission as the True Parents of humankind and therefore were jointly The Lord of the Second Advent.

With Unificationist members in more settled lives and Moon having announced achieving the requisites for messianic status, it was not apparent what Unificationism's future direction might be. Within a few years, however, it became clear that Moon was going to attempt to arrest the slide toward settled lives and an established church. In 1996 he declared that the Unification Church era had ended, and the church was to be supplanted by the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU). The Unification Church would continue its worship function for core believers, he said, but the principal mission and thrust of Unificationist action would be the dissemination of its family values as well as the furtherance of its longstanding objective of creating a single world spiritual community beyond race, ethnicity or creed.^[iv] In his pronouncement Moon clearly held up the quasi-religious FFWPU as superior to a church-based mode of restoring the world to God:

For the first time in human history, we have entered a new era that does not require salvation through religion. The objective of the Family Federation lies in transforming families into ideal families, thereby restoring and perfecting God's ideal of creation and establishing the ideal heavenly world.^[v]

The most important FFWPU changes were the extension of the sacramental Unificationist marriage blessing to non-Unificationist couples and a major concentration on peace initiatives. Both of these initiatives allowed Moon to continue to exercise and to expand his messianic responsibilities. The Blessing had always been the central ritual in Unificationism, signifying the realignment of the couple under Moon's messianic authority from a Satan-centered to a God-centered lineage. However, the ritual had been limited to Unificationists, many of whom waited patiently for many years to earn the opportunity for this transformative moment. The extension of the Blessing to outsiders allowed Moon to dramatically increase the number of individuals who were restored, at least nominally under his messianic authority. Likewise, Moon had created a number of organizations, most notably the Professors World Peace Academy that was established in 1973, whose goals were to create forums at which influentials could gather for discussions promoting world peace. The FFWPU made peace initiatives a central Unificationist priority,^[vi] one that eventually settled under a new umbrella organization, the Universal Peace Federation (UPF).^[vii]

These FFWPU initiatives reinstated the religious movement orientation reminiscent of the early movement and achieved certain objectives. It clarified many of the values of Unificationism; symbolic victories could be declared as more married couples were connected to the Lord of the Second Advent; and a broader array of organizations could be brought into a positive working relationship with Unificationism. However, the movement oriented FFWPU failed to address three major issues confronting Unificationism during the 1990s.

First, Unificationist leaders attempted to create congruity between the two organizations by renaming their individual parishes "Family" churches (such as the New York Family Church or the New Hope Family Church) to accommodate the

FFWPU emphasis on family, but this was largely a cosmetic change that did little to dispel the confusion experienced by both insiders and outsiders. Further, FFWPU's partnership philosophy implied a modification of worship services to a more non-sectarian format. Where did that leave the doctrinal system and accompanying practices through which Unificationists understood their membership? Open letter correspondence from Unificationist leaders indicates the perplexity that the new directions generated and the struggle to implement compatible strategies.[viii]

Second, continuing the religious movement orientation largely ignored the very real organizational problems that had been building up within Unificationism. During the 1990s the economic conglomerate that Moon had developed in Korea collapsed.[ix] The centerpiece *Washington Times* was struggling financially and continued to constitute a major economic financial drain on Unificationism.[x] Local and national church groups had failed to become financially self-sufficient. Beyond these economic problems confronting Unificationism, new member recruitment was stagnant, and morale among existing membership was low. [xi]

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the new organization raised the question of what role Moon's successors would play as Unificationist leaders. They would be organizing largely symbolic events as Moon had earlier but without possessing Moon's messianic credentials, authority, or mission. Faced with a largely settled membership base that could not be mobilized for another world transforming campaign, serious financial problems that threatened Unificationism's ability to support a world transforming mission, and an ambiguous role for the emerging Unificationist leaders, the established church-religious movement tensions directly impacted and interacted with the leadership succession process.

Unificationist Leadership Transition

As Moon began approaching his eightieth birthday in 2000, he set in motion a succession process that eventually encompassed four of his children, all of whom were highly educated with professional-managerial degrees from prestigious universities. What emerged was a conflict among his children that mirrored the tension between religious movement and established church organization causing the momentum within Unificationism to switch again, and probably decisively this time, toward a more conventional church organization.

This transition commenced in 1998 when the Moons' third son, Hyun-Jin, who held an M.B.A. from Harvard, assumed what appeared to be a commanding position in Unificationism. He was first appointed Vice-President of the International FFWPU by his parents, with his father-in-law and longtime Unificationist leader Chung-Hwan Pak serving as president. Two years later Hyun-Jin was placed in charge of the Unificationist youth organizations. In 2005 he became co-chairman of the newly created UPF.[xii] A year later he was brought in by his father to troubleshoot the failing *Washington Times*. [xiii] In the process he was given control of the American branch's funding vehicle, the Unification Church International, which holds profits from the American branch's extensive fishing and seafood holdings and uses those profits to underwrite its social and other non-profit programs.[xiv] Hyun-Jin apparently strongly supported the movement-centered world family approach and was soon being touted as Reverend Moon's heir apparent.[xv]

The experiment with the "one family under God" movement approach lasted about a decade, but did not successfully address the problems of local church and congregation viability, the financial erosion of the movement, or meaningful leadership roles for Moon's successors. The tensions surfaced and blunted Hyun-Jin's leadership ascendancy when Moon's youngest son, Hyung-Jin, a Harvard Master of Divinity graduate, took on pastoral responsibilities in Seoul in 2007. Making an immediate impact, he was very soon installed as senior pastor in the Seoul headquarters church.[xvi] By April, 2008, he had risen to be installed as both the position of head of Unificationism's Korean branch and, more significantly, president of the international FFWPU, effectively ousting the former Kwak-Hyun Jin leadership.[xvii] That same year he assumed the presidency of World Collegiate Association for the Research of Principle (CARP), the Unification student wing, which until that time also had been headed by Hyun-Jin.[xviii]

Two other Moon children also had assumed prominent leadership roles. Kook-Jin Moon, the Moon's fourth son, who was also an M.B.A. graduate and highly successful business entrepreneur, was brought to Korea in 2005 to rescue the faltering Unification-owned business empire there. A 2010 *Forbes* interview quotes him as claiming a significant turnaround since his takeover, much of it achieved through rationalization and headhunting more competent management personnel. The business group's foundation that underwrote the Korean branch's not-for-profit organizations and activities was likewise placed in his hands.[xix] Finally, the Moon's second eldest daughter, In-Jin Moon, another Harvard Master of Divinity graduate, took over as President and CEO of the American Unification branch in August, 2008.[xx]

Transitioning Toward Church-Style Organization

While Hyun-Jin continued to pursue the original FFWPU agenda via the Global Peace Festivals initiative he created in 2008, the other three successors to Unificationist leadership formed a triumvirate that moved rapidly in the direction of church-style organization, and each contributed to shoring up the organizational base. Kook-Jin, who had restructured the Korean Unification businesses, also undertook an evaluation tour of 120 of the Korean church branches in late 2006 to mid-2007. He quickly recognized that an urgent restructuring was required in the church sector as well.[xxi] With Kook-Jin's apparent backing, Hyung-Jin set about sweeping away the moribund culture that had overtaken the Korean branch. He changed emphasis to ministering to existing members and updated weekly service formats. Tithing was encouraged so that the Korean branch would be self-supporting instead of relying on contributions from Japan, as it had apparently been doing for a good many years. Elections were held. Teamship and accountability were the new watchwords. Other modernizations were introduced. Unusual in a country whose culture is still largely patriarchal, women were given more ministerial roles in congregations.[xxii] Further, consistent with Unification doctrine of male-female parity, the new Korean pastor and his wife jointly conducted services. A short meditation session and a music worship team were other significant innovations. Sermon language was inclusive and affirmative, with the emphasis being on practical spirituality.[xxiii] As a result of all these measures, member morale and involvement significantly improved, congregations became self-supporting and new members began to join, all within a very short time.[xxiv]

While these innovations moved Unificationism in a more church-style direction, Hyung-Jin also began adopting doctrinal interpretations that created some controversy. His sermon language now changed to greater exclusivity, with the True Parents increasingly Christologized.[xxv] This constitutes a major departure from previously, where Reverend Moon was portrayed more as the chief instrument of salvation for the new age, a coalitional head of a world messianic movement rather than a sole instrument of world redemption. This new emphasis has distinctly moved Unificationism in a more sectarian direction.

In the United States, the new American pastor In-Jin Moon took steps to revivify American congregations. Having become CEO of the church's Manhattan Center in New York following the death of the eldest male sibling Hyo-Jin Moon, she used its facilities as the basis for a new church platform that she called 'Lovin' Life Ministries' (LLM). Modeled on the American mega-church style, a top-notch band and sermons of hope and positivity soon had members pouring into the Manhattan Center every week, particularly second-generation members. In a major innovation, the Manhattan Center worship services were also delivered by direct satellite broadcast to congregations throughout the United States as a basis for their weekly services. LLM in New York also instituted a learning center as a new method of outreach, offering everything from "relationship" classes to dancing classes to Unificationism study classes. Witnessing was stepped up, but prominence was given to real-life application of Unification values and teachings rather than the philosophical and theoretical approach of the past.[xxvi]

The triumvirate's intentions to commit to a church strategy have become clear and were candidly stated by Hyung-Jin Moon in his 2008 inaugural address:

We manifestly have a theology, our Divine Principle and True Father's teachings and we have True Father himself. Therefore, without a doubt we should strengthen our church. I strongly believe that we need to develop our church further, so that more people can really serve and support True Parents.[xxvii]

Similarly, in his CARP inaugural address, he stated:

In this new era finding many members for the Unification Church is the new providential mission. True Parents gave me the mission of creating a church where membership increases in number, rather than a church that holds providential events and provides education.[xxviii]

For his part, Hyun-Jin was continuing the FFWPU agenda via the Global Peace Festivals under UPF auspices. These festivals each drew thousands of participants, and his organization forged partnerships with other global peace groups. However, this initiative was ignored by his siblings. This was evident even in the earliest speeches and sermons by Hyung-Jin, Kook-Jin, and Il-Jin, which were all fulsome in praise of each others' work and achievements, while the work of sibling Hyun-Jin rarely received a mention. Moreover, veiled criticism of the Peace Festivals was detectable.[xxix] Conflict has since become more open, extending to theological demonization of Hyun-Jin and his allies as "satanic," which implies being motivated by power, and has begun to impact more widely.[xxx] The Mongolian branch, whose leaders were Chung-Hwan Kwak and his son Jin-Man, seceded from its affiliation with Unificationism in December 2010.[xxxi]

While there is continued skirmishing between the factions, the ascendancy of the church building approach continues. On June 24, 2010, the end of the FFWPU era was sealed, at least symbolically, when the official name of Unificationism's international organization was changed from FFWPU to Unification Church World Mission Headquarters.[xxxii] Whatever else can be said about the internal struggle for power within Unificationism and the angst this has caused many members, the new church strategy that now holds sway has addressed the problems of congregation stability, financial solvency, and leadership succession opportunities more effectively than the movement oriented FFWPU.

Conclusions

As new religious groups develop over time there often is a tendency for them to assume a more settled form, and this tendency is reinforced at the moment when the group's founder/leader dies or relinquishes authority. There currently is an opportunity to observe both of these processes at work in Unificationism. Unificationism is a new religious group that has embodied both church and movement characteristics throughout its history. These two organizational orientations have frequently been in tension with one another, and through the early history of Unificationism in the United States it was the movement orientation that prevailed. The messianic agenda of Rev. Moon and a membership base of recent, highly motivated converts supported the movement orientation. The aging of first generation members, the blessing of members in marriage, and Rev. Moon's announcement that the requisites of the messiahship had been fulfilled subsequently combined to weaken that orientation. Moon's decision to begin the leadership transition process by passing authority to his children raised the tensions once again, and Moon again attempted to reinvigorate the movement. However, in this instance the interests of his highly educated, management oriented successors, who lacked his messianic mission and credentials, pulled Unificationism in a more church-style direction. While some divisions remain within the Moon family and schism between national groups or organizational components of Unificationism remains a possibility, particularly upon Rev. Moon's passing, Unificationism appears headed in a more settled, accommodative direction.

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The following article was posted on the familyfed.org web site:

Church or federation?

SHOULD WE SAY WE ARE A CHURCH OR A FEDERATION?

Scholars To Publish Report on the New Leadership of Unification Church 08-11-2011

Two scholarly experts on new religious movements will publish an analysis of the emerging strategy of the new leaders of the Unification Church in a forthcoming issue of *Nova Religio, The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*.

Prof. David Bromley, Professor of Religious Studies and Sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University, and Alexa Blonner, an early member of the Unification Movement and today a graduate student residing in Australia, conclude that the new leadership of the Unification Church, i.e. Rev. Hyung Jin Moon, Rev. In Jin Moon, and Mr. Kook Jin Moon have adopted a leadership strategy that solves fundamental problems that had plagued the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU). "[T]he new church strategy that now holds sway has addressed the problems of congregation stability, financial solvency, and leadership succession opportunities more effectively than the movement-oriented FFWPU," the authors write. Prof. Bromley and Ms. Blonner have written a paper entitled "From the Unification Church to the Unification Movement and Back," a draft of which has been provided to Familyfed.org.

The authors tell their readers that they are reporting on the transition of leadership in the Unification Movement in the context of other religious movements. "Two widely observed patterns in the development of new religious movements are a gradual settling of the movement and a transition in leadership from the movement founder/leader(s) to their successors. We report here on the confluence of these two developments in Unificationism over the last several years," they write.

They add: "Two principal changes in Unificationist organization have occurred. First, the longstanding tensions between established church and social movement forms of organization are being resolved in favor of the former. Second, Rev. Moon has begun passing organizational leadership to several of his children. Both of these processes have involved considerable turmoil, and the two developments have overlapped and interacted with one another."

"The movement-oriented FFWPU failed to address three major issues confronting Unificationism during the 1990s," according to the authors. The three issues mentioned in the paper are problems of self-understanding, finances, and the challenge of the Founders' succession.

First, the name change to "Family Federation" confused both members and religious allies in other communities. Many in the movement wondered aloud about the definition of "membership." Second, after many in the movement had settled into child-rearing, there was a problem of financing the movement-oriented projects such as the many ecumenical gatherings for clergy, peace conferences, and subsidizing *The Washington Times*, but without the large base of young, unmarried church activists who could provide the funding for these efforts. "Continuing the religious movement orientation largely ignored the very real organizational problems that had been building up within Unificationism. During the 1990s the economic conglomerate that Moon had developed in Korea collapsed. The centerpiece *Washington Times* was struggling financially and continued to constitute a major economic financial drain on Unificationism," the authors explain.

Third, there was the problem of establishing the role of Rev. Moon's children as his successors. Would they follow in his footsteps as leaders of a global, social movement or as pastors of a discreetly-defined new church? Prof. Bromley and Ms. Blonner write: "Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the new organization raised the question of what role Moon's successors would play as Unificationist leaders. They would be organizing largely symbolic events as Moon had earlier but without possessing Moon's messianic credentials, authority, or mission." They conclude that the Rev. Hyung Jin Moon and two of his siblings decided to revive the name, doctrine and values of the Unification Church, yet with substantial improvements to its ministry and approach to outreach.

Prof. Bromley and Ms. Blonner are the first scholars to report on the innovations to ministry in the United States led by the national pastor of the Unification Church, Rev. In Jin Moon. “In the United States, the new American pastor In-Jin Moon took steps to revivify American congregations. Having become CEO of the church’s Manhattan Center in New York following the death of the eldest male sibling Hyo-Jin Moon, she used its facilities as the basis for a new church platform that she called ‘Lovin’ Life Ministries’ (LLM). Modeled on the American mega-church style, a top-notch band and sermons of hope and positivity soon had members pouring into the Manhattan Center every week, particularly second-generation members. In a major innovation, the Manhattan Center worship services were also delivered by direct satellite broadcast to congregations throughout the United States as a basis for their weekly services. LLM in New York also instituted a learning center as a new method of outreach, offering everything from ‘relationship’ classes to dancing classes to Unificationism-study classes. Witnessing was stepped up, but prominence was given to real-life application of Unification values and teachings rather than the philosophical and theoretical approach of the past.”

During the same period, Dr. Hyun Jin Moon, the eldest surviving son of Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, has continued to pursue the movement-oriented approach at “Global Peace Festivals” under the banner of “One Family Under God.” The scholars write that “The experiment with the ‘one family under God’ movement approach lasted about a decade, but did not successfully address the problems of local church and congregation viability, the financial erosion of the movement, or meaningful leadership roles for Moon’s successors.”

The authors conclude: “While some divisions remain within the Moon family and schism between national groups or organizational components of Unificationism remains a possibility, particularly upon Rev. Moon’s passing, Unificationism appears headed in a more settled, accommodative direction.”